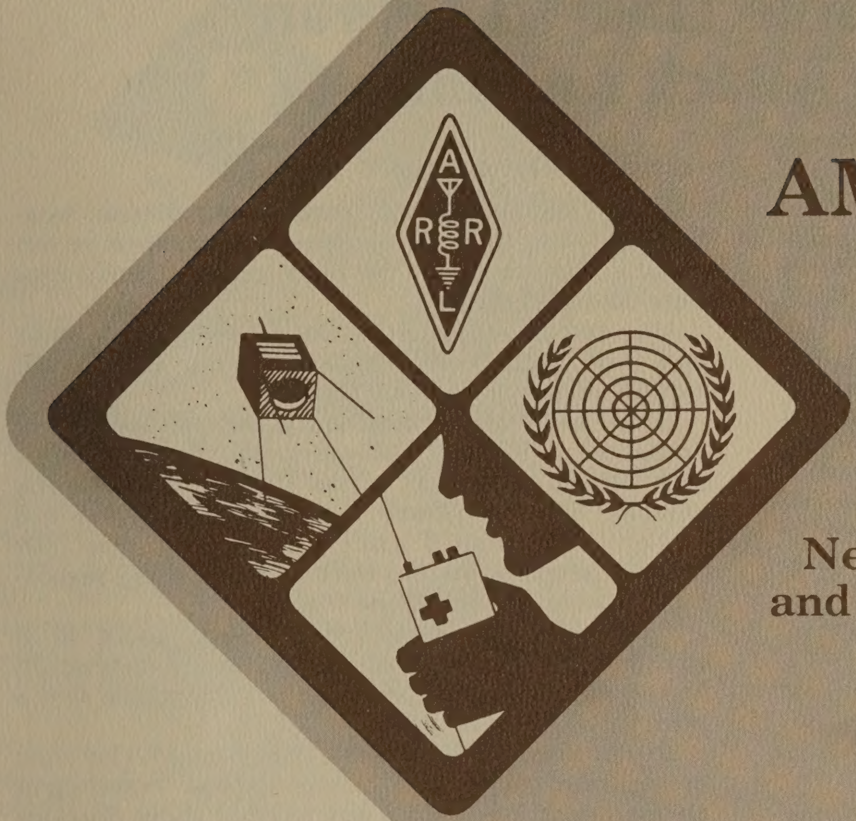

AMATEURADIO

News of the Amateur Radio and Amateur Satellite Services

February 1981
A Publication of the American Radio Relay League, Inc. Volume 2 Number 2

Ham Operator Received Early Word of Hostages' Flight From Iran

Scott Thompson of Visalia, California listened to history being made — about a half hour before most other people in this country.

Thompson, 32, a ham radio operator, was tuning his radio for Reagan inaugural activities when the release of the American hostages was imminent.

Thompson said he flipped to an international band "just to be nosy" and heard reports on the final preparations for the hostages' release before they were confirmed for Americans.

Tehran Radio was not coming in clearly, the Visalia ham operator said, so he listened to the British Broadcasting Corporation, which announced the jet's departure from Iranian airspace. He guessed the aircraft must have crossed the Turkish border judging by its flight time.

"Unfortunately, they weren't saying where the plane was, so, using a map, I figured out it was Turkey," Thompson said.

Earlier in the day, Thompson said, he heard a report from the overseas broadcast service that a Greek television team had seen the hostages being loaded into a plane from a darkened bus.

And over the weekend, Thompson said, he learned of the last-minute snag which delayed the hostages' release in a BBC announcement "when everyone else was announcing everything was going great."

Thompson said he had tuned earlier to an amateur station which was broadcasting from president-elect Reagan's birthplace of Tampico, Illinois in commemoration of the inauguration.

But the overseas bands, which were bristling with news of the hostages, kept his attention.

A ham radio operator for nearly 4 years, Thompson said he was skeptical about the reports he was hearing.

"I'm a doubting Thomas. I have been all along," he said, adding, "I wouldn't believe it until they were on the ground and identified by fingerprints or family members."

"When I have the time to come in here and listen, it's always neat to hear this stuff a long time before the news services carry it," Thompson remarked while sitting in his amateur station.

On international events like the hostage crisis, Thompson said, "Foreign broadcasts I receive on my ham radio equipment are usually ahead of what I can hear on my television set."

— From Wire Services

Ham Radio Sole Link To Tehran During First Attack on Embassy

Nine months before the November 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran, guerrilla forces overran the same embassy compound. During the first few hours of that crisis, the only contact State Department officials had with their embassy personnel was through U.S. Amateur Radio operators, who were in touch with other amateur operators in Iran. Shortly after, all amateur operation in Iran ceased. Here is an account of one amateur's experiences during that crisis, as reported by the Washington Star on February 15, 1979.

For four hours Wednesday (February 14), the only contact between the State Department and the U.S. Embasssy in Tehran was a ham radio operator in Orlando, Florida.

"I can't believe that we conducted State Department business over amateur radio," said Charles Watters, 54, an amateur operator and owner of an electronics firm in Orlando.

From 6:30 to 10:30 a.m., Watters' radio was the only link between government officials in Washington and their counterparts in Tehran after guerrillas took over the embassy.

When the guerrillas entered, the embassy staff blew up the embassy radio. Phone communications were also cut, severing direct connections with the embassy from Washington.

Watters said he had established contact with two amateur operators in Tehran two weeks prior, when he was seeking information on his sister and her family who were stationed there.

After embassy communications were severed, Watters said, State Department officials called him and asked if he was still in contact with Tehran.

"They were very concerned about the welfare of Ambassador (William) Sullivan at the time," Watters said. He said his contact in Iran was able to phone the embassy (internal phone communications were not broken until about 8 a.m.) and reported that "100 hooded people with guns were in the embassy, searching everyone and rifling the files."

Communications were finally broken about 10:30 a.m., and Watters said he was told his two contacts would try to raise him again the next day if they could find a place to set up their radios.

One of the two, Watters said, had strung his antenna between two apartment buildings and was "holed-up in an apartment. He said he was worried about door-to-door searches."

That evening, Watters said, other amateur operators tuned in to the frequency in hopes of maintaining the communications.

"It was a very frightening affair, seeing history made," said Watters, a ham operator for over 30 years. "It shows you how fragile communications really are."

Texas Meteorologist Puts Twist In Amateur Weather Watch

Amateur Radio operators in Texas know a potential tornado when they see one, thanks to local meteorologist Alan Moller.

Moller, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service and a self-described "tornado freak," has been stalking twisters since 1971. In that time, Moller said, he has seen more than 55 tornadoes, most of them in western Texas.

"I go out and try to capture (on film) the exact time the storm develops, its touchdown and dissipation," Moller said. "By going out and chasing them, I have found out that storms which produce tornadoes have definite visual patterns."

Moller, 30, said he uses the information he gets from observing twisters to teach Amateur Radio operators how to spot the tell-tale rotating clouds in severe thunderstorms which commonly produce tornadoes.

The amateur operators are members of "Skywarn," a volunteer weather watch group in northern Texas. When bad weather develops, the amateurs are called on by the National Weather Service to go out in the field to watch the sky for the signs of developing tornadoes which meteorologists cannot detect on radar.

Moller, who is in charge of the Skywarn program in northern Texas, said his field studies have helped him and his group of Amateur Radio operators make the early warning program in his area the "best in the country."

Launch Date Set

According to *Orbit* magazine, a publication of the Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation (AMSAT) in Washington, D.C., the next amateur communications satellite is scheduled to be launched in February 1982.

The satellite, Phase IIIB, which will be called AMSAT-OSCAR 10 when in orbit, will ride into space "piggy-back" aboard a European Space Agency launch vehicle, the magazine said.

While in orbit, the satellite will be used to conduct numerous experiments, as well as serve as a communications link for Amateur Radio operators around the world, radio amateurs building the spacecraft at AMSAT said. The Phase IIIB craft is replacing an earlier satellite which failed to reach orbit last May when the booster vehicle it was riding malfunctioned and crashed into the Atlantic Ocean shortly after takeoff.

AMSAT-OSCAR 9, an experimental satellite with no communications capabilities now being built by radio amateurs at the University of Surrey, England, is scheduled to be launched this September. OSCARs 7 and 8 are still in orbit and operating as planned, an AMSAT official said.

The OSCAR (Orbiting Satellite Carrying Amateur Radio) series began in 1961 with the launch of OSCAR 1, the world's first non-governmental satellite.

Hams In Retirement Work in Emergencies

If a hurricane or tornado happens to knock out electricity and telephones in the retirement village of Sun City Center, Florida, a group of Amateur Radio operators there are prepared to keep the communications lines open.

By setting up a radio communications center in one of the town's buildings, the Sun City Center Amateur Radio Club will be able to help relatives stay in touch and get emergency aid to the town if it's needed, the club's vice president, Svend T. Gormsen said.

"Last winter some of us got together to get the club started," Gormsen said. We thought the interest was here for a club, so we called a meeting and put up a notice. We thought there were only 17 hams and not all of them would show up, but we had 22."

The bylaws were written and the club was registered with the Sun City Civic Association.

"The main purpose of the club," said the 71-year-old native of Denmark, "is to have an Amateur Radio emergency station capable of operating on emergency power. It's a complete station with all frequencies — we can talk with other hams anywhere in the world. And it's powered by a generator, so no commercial electricity is needed," Gormsen said.

"What if somebody gets sick — and somebody gets sick here every day — and the telephone lines are out and there's no electricity? We can have a doctor in here by getting on the radio and calling outside," he said.

The club's secondary aim, Gormsen said, is to help local people who are interested in becoming hams by conducting classes which help prepare them for the Novice license.

Gormsen himself is a seasoned veteran when it comes to radios. Shortly after arriving in the U.S. as an 18-year-old immigrant from Denmark, Gormsen was introduced to ham radio when he answered a newspaper ad which read, "Come to Chicago and learn radio."

"My friends thought I was crazy, but I went anyway," recalls the Sun City ham operator.

That was in 1929. Today, after more than 50 years, Gormsen still enjoys "hamming it up" on the airwaves.

— *The Tampa (FLA) Tribune*

Three Amateurs Cited

Three Amateur Radio operators were recently cited by the National Weather Association for their efforts in providing emergency weather communications in the public interest.

One amateur operator, Edward "Doc" Dougherty of Frederick, Maryland, received NWA's 1980 award for the "greatest contribution to meteorological operations by an individual who is not part of that professional community."

Dougherty, who received his award at NWA's annual meeting St. Louis, Missouri last December, was commended for his more than 50 years service to the forecast and emergency weather operations of the National Weather Service.

The other two ham operators, Arthur Erickson of Fort Collins, Colorado and Theodore Hummel of Cheyenne, Wyoming, received honorable mentions for their weather observations and emergency communications support during several severe weather outbreaks in 1979 and 1980.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE AMATEUR RADIO SERVICE? Contact Perry Williams, ARRL's Washington Area Coordinator, and arrange for a personal visit by calling (202) 296-9107.

ALONG LEAGUE LINES

Marketplace forces — a buzzword around Washington during the prior administration, and we think even more so during this administration.

A basic tenet of the free enterprise system is that government intervention should be avoided if at all possible; it is far better to let the people decide for themselves how scarce resources should be allocated, and the prime method for doing so is to allow free rein to the marketplace. Marketplace forces will bid up the price of scarcer resources, will bid down the price of more abundant or less valued resources. And for the most part it works.

Certain of the FCC staff would like to apply the concept of marketplace forces to the allocation of the radio and television airwaves. They say that certain frequencies should be put up to bid, should be auctioned off. Those to whom the frequencies are more valuable would be willing to pay more. At the same time, putting a price on the airwaves would encourage greater conservation of frequencies and would provide an incentive for research into technological improvements which would allow more radio or TV signals to fit into the same amount of space on the dial.

It's an innovative concept, and perhaps an apt one, for the radio and TV frequency spectrum is a scarce resource; there's only so much to go around. But at the same time it causes us deep concern because the concept of marketplace forces is totally inconsistent with the basis and purpose of the Amateur Radio Service. Marketplace forces may very well work in the world of commercial (for-profit) radio and TV, but not in Amateur Radio.

Amateur Radio operators do not make a profit; in fact, in the financial sense, they incur a loss. They build and operate their stations for the intrinsic pleasure it gives them, and to serve the public day in and day out. If asked to "bid" for frequencies, there is no way the over 370,000 U.S. amateurs could compete with commercial interests. We hope it doesn't come to that, because if it did there would be two losers: the Amateur Radio Service, and the American public.

American Radio Relay League, Inc.
225 Main Street
Newington, Connecticut 06111

Since 1914, in the public interest

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Hartford, Conn.
Permit 2929

AMATEURADIO is published monthly by the Public Information Office of the American Radio Relay League,
225 Main Street,
Newington, Connecticut 06111;
telephone (203) 666-1541.

Harry J. Dannals
President

Richard L. Baldwin
General Manager

Andrew J. Tripp
Editor